

# **Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project**

## **Wetlands Managers Group Report June 6, 2002**

---

### **Report on WRP Work Plan Projects**

---

#### **Summary of Recommended Actions**

- Adopt 2002-2003 Work Plan

#### **Overview of Report**

This Wetlands Managers Group report is divided into two parts. The first section provides a progress report on the 2001-2002 Work Plan. The second section describes the draft 2002-2003 Work Plan that is recommended for adoption by the Governing Board. The following attachments provide more detailed information on project descriptions, status, and funding:

##### *Attachments*

- A. 2002-2003 Work Plan summary
- B. Summary of Project Costs and Funding Sources for Projects In Development, and for Completed and Funded Projects
- C. Descriptions of 2002-2003 Work Plan Projects
- D. Descriptions of Completed Projects
- E. Project Evaluation Criteria

#### **Update on 2001-2002 Work Plan Projects**

Over the past year, the Coastal Conservancy and the Wetlands Managers Group (WMG) have been working with partner agencies to implement the projects on the 2001-2002 Work Plan. Of the 51 projects on the 2001-2002 Work Plan,<sup>1</sup> six were completed over the past year and 15 were funded (see Attachment F). Key accomplishments and project highlights are provided below.

- **Arroyo Hondo Acquisition** – The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County completed the purchase of the 800-acre Arroyo Hondo ranch for \$6,176,000 in October 2001.
- **Santa Monica Mountain Acquisitions** – Two acquisitions of valuable riparian and associated upland habitat were completed in the Santa Monica Mountains. The WRP contributed \$719,000 to acquisition of 71 acres along Cold Creek, a tributary to the Malibu Creek. \$800,000 was provided for acquisition of 417 acres along Tuna Canyon, a small coastal watershed just north of Topanga Canyon.

---

<sup>1</sup> 49 adopted at the May 2001 meeting and 2 added by consensus in February 2002.

- **Huntington Beach Wetlands Acquisition** – In October 2001, the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy completed acquisition of approximately 20 acres of the Huntington Beach Wetlands from Southern California Edison. The WRP contributed \$670,000 to the acquisition.
- **Topanga Canyon Feasibility Study** – In May 2002, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains completed the Topanga Lagoon and Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study. The RCD will now prepare more detailed technical studies related to restoration of the lagoon which is one of the new projects recommended on the 2002-2003 Work Plan.
- **Grimes Canyon Restoration** – The Ventura County Resource Conservation District completed stream bank stabilization and riparian restoration projects along Grimes Canyon in the Calleguas Creek watershed. The RCD will use the projects to demonstrate bank stabilization and revegetation techniques to local landowners.
- **Los Cerritos Wetlands** – Negotiations for acquisition of three properties at the Los Cerritos Wetlands (Bixby, Bryant, and Hellman) continue to move forward. It is expected that acquisition of the Hellman property will be completed within the next few months. The Coastal Conservancy has begun meeting with partner agencies regarding restoration planning for the Hellman Property and surrounding public lands, and a preliminary restoration study should begin within the next few months.
- **Ballona Wetlands Acquisition** – During the past year, private landowners of the Ballona Wetlands complex became willing to discuss a conservation sale for portions of the property. The Trust for Public Land is leading the acquisition negotiations. Acquisition at Ballona is recommended as a new project on the 2002-2003 Work Plan.
- **Ormond Beach Wetlands** – Acquisition negotiations for several properties totaling approximately 750 acres at the Ormond Beach wetlands have more become active in recent months. Southern California Edison entered into an agreement to sell approximately 300 acres of the Ormond Beach wetlands to Occidental Petroleum for a proposed liquefied natural gas facility. The State of California has first right of refusal over sale of this property and is currently reviewing the acquisition terms. In addition, the Coastal Conservancy is preparing an offers for property jointly owned by the City of Oxnard and the Metropolitan Water District, as well as for an adjoining agricultural piece formerly owned by Edison.

The Wetlands Recovery Project began fiscal year 2001-2002 with approximately \$9.5 million in state funds available for Work Plan projects. Of this, approximately \$7.2 million has been spent on Work Plan projects. An additional \$2.17 million of WRP funds has been reserved for the Ormond Beach Edison Acquisition, along with substantial amounts of other Coastal Conservancy funding. At this time, the Coastal Conservancy has expended or reserved all of the available WRP funds.

## 2002-2003 Work Plan

### Introduction

The Wetlands Recovery Project Managers Group (WMG) recommends that the Governing Board adopt the draft 2002-2003 Work Plan. The draft Work Plan includes 68 projects, 21 of which have already been funded and are currently being implemented. These 68 projects, the process for selecting them, and the strategy for implementing are described below and in the attachments that follow.

### Evaluation and Review of New Project Proposals

The 2002-2003 Work Plan was developed through an extensive process that involved the WMG, County Task Forces, and the Coastal Conservancy. The process included the following steps:

1. **Request for Project Proposals** – The WRP sent out a request for project proposals to approximately 1000 people via its email list, and posted the RFP on its website. A total of 31 proposals were received. In addition, a few projects being pursued by the Coastal Conservancy or other partner agencies were submitted for review.
2. **Regional Meetings** – The WMG and County Task Forces hosted three regional meetings to discuss project proposals prior to the RFP deadline. Project proponents were given suggestions on how to strengthen their proposals, as well as on which aspects of their projects best matched the goals and objectives of the WRP.
3. **Proposal Review** – Proposals were distributed to members of the WMG and each of the County Task Forces. Each Task Force devised its own process for reviewing and ranking project proposals, ranging from informal discussions at Task Force meetings to numerical ranking based on selected criteria. Proposals were also reviewed and discussed in depth by Coastal Conservancy staff.
4. **Project Evaluation and Review** – The WMG plus one representative from each of the County Task Forces then met to discuss the project proposals. Projects were evaluated based on the WRP's adopted criteria (Attachment D), which include ecological, feasibility and policy considerations. 19 new projects were selected for inclusion on the Work Plan. Seven of these projects are continuations of efforts that have previously been supported by the WRP or Coastal Conservancy. For instance, two years ago the WRP funded a plan for restoration of Basin 1 at Carpinteria Salt Marsh. The Land Trust of Santa Barbara County will be ready to implement that plan next spring, so implementation of the Basin 1 restoration is recommended as a "new" project on the Work Plan.

Project proposals for the 2002-2003 Small Grants Program (SGP) were reviewed and selected through a similar, but separate process. Project proposals were solicited through the WRP email list and website. A total of 29 proposals were received. SGP applications were distributed to each of the County Task Forces, the Coastal Conservancy (as representative of the WMG), and Environment Now (the manager of the SGP). Again, each Task Force devised its own process for reviewing ranking project proposals. The Small Grants selection committee consisted of one

representative from Environment Now, the Coastal Conservancy, and each of the County Task Forces. Nine projects were selected for the program, totaling approximately \$200,000.

### **Implementation Strategy for 2002-2003 Work Plan**

As the WRP begins its fifth year and continues to take on new projects while also working to complete earlier projects, implementation of the Work Plan has become increasingly challenging. The State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), as staff to the WRP, is primarily responsible for developing a strategy to meet this challenge. The main policies of the Conservancy's implementation strategy are discussed below.

**Tiers 1 and 2** – The WMG has divided the draft Work Plan into two tiers which reflect its initial priorities for allocation of funding and staff resources. The two tiers are differentiated as follows:

- **Tier 1** projects must be *both* a high priority for the WRP *and* ready to implement in the short-term. In creating the tier system, the WMG's intention was to ensure that the WRP (through appropriations to the Coastal Conservancy for the WRP) has sufficient funding for all Tier 1 projects. However, due to uncertainties about the state budget for fiscal year 02-03, the WMG was unable to take this into account during this year's selection process. The recommended WRP (SCC) contribution to Tier 1 projects totals of approximately \$7.7 million. Tier 1 will be revised if there is insufficient funding in the 02-03 budget to cover this amount.
- **Tier 2** includes projects that need further development, are subject to significant uncertainties, and/or are of lower priority. Tier 2 includes several high priority projects that are not ready to move forward at this time.

Implementation of the Work Plan will initially focus on the seven Tier 1 projects, along with continuation of the 20 projects which have been funded but are not yet complete. Implementation of Tier 2 projects will progress as funding and staff resources permit. The Coastal Conservancy, in consultation with the WRP, must balance several factors in prioritizing its resources to implement these projects. Considerations include:

- **Ecological significance** – There are several projects on the Tier 2 list that are high priorities due to their potential ecological significance to Southern California coastal wetlands and watersheds. These include, among others, acquisition of the Los Cerritos, Ballona, and Ormond Beach wetlands complexes and restoration at Bolsa Chica and Tijuana Estuary. All of these projects have difficult issues that must be addressed, and the Coastal Conservancy will continue to dedicate a significant portion of staff resources towards moving these projects forward.
- **Continuation of Previous Commitment** – The Coastal Conservancy will give greater priority to projects that are a continuation of an effort in which the WRP has already invested. For instance, all else being equal, the Conservancy would give greater priority to implementation of a restoration project that the WRP helped plan than to a project that the WRP has not worked on before. In short, this is a policy to “finish what we start” in order to ensure that the initial investment of funds is not wasted.

- **Balance Short-term and Long-term Gains** – The amount of staff time required to implement a project can vary dramatically based on project complexity and the experience of the local partner. Implementing simpler projects or working with experienced local partners can result in more immediate benefits to coastal wetlands and watersheds. However, in order to achieve its long-term vision for the region, the WRP must also invest funding and staff resources into solving complex issues in the region and building the capacity of local partners to take on restoration projects. The Coastal Conservancy will balance short- and long-term gains in allocating its resources.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The WMG recommends that the Board of Governors adopt the draft 2002-2003 Work Plan, with the goal of implementing as many of the projects as possible (within timing and funding constraints), and with the flexibility to add a project(s) in the event one should become immediately viable (the Board of Governors will be notified by fax or email).